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# LIFTED BANDAGE

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**MARY RAYMOND SHIPMAN ANDREWS**

**Author of The Perfect Tribute**



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## **THE LIFTED BANDAGE**

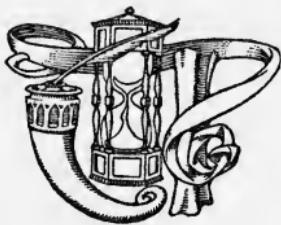


# THE LIFTED BANDAGE

By

Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews

Author of "The Perfect Tribute," etc.



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## THE LIFTED BANDAGE

THE man let himself into his front door and, staggering lightly, like a drunken man, as he closed it, walked to the hall table, and mechanically laid down his hat, but still wearing his over-coat turned and went into his library, and dropped on the edge of a divan and stared out through the leaded panes of glass across the room facing him. The grayish skin of his face seemed to fall in diagonal furrows, from the eyes, from the nose, from the mouth. He sat, still to his finger-tips, staring.

He was sitting so when a servant slipped in and stood motionless a

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minute, and went to the wide window where the west light glared through leafless branches outside, and drew the shades lower, and went to the fireplace and touched a match. Wood caught and crackled and a cheerful orange flame flew noisily up the chimney, but the man sitting on the divan did not notice. The butler waited a moment, watching, hesitating, and then:

“Have you had lunch, sir?” he asked in a tentative, gentle voice.

The staring eyes moved with an effort and rested on the servant’s face. “Lunch?” he repeated, apparently trying to focus on the meaning of the word. “Lunch? I don’t know, Miller. But don’t bring anything.”

With a great anxiety in his face

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Miller regarded his master. "Would you let me take your overcoat, Judge?—you'll be too warm," he said.

He spoke in a suppressed tone as if waiting for, fearing something, as if longing to show sympathy, and the man stood and let himself be cared for, and then sat down again in the same unrestful, fixed attitude, gazing out again through the glittering panes into the stormy, tawny west sky. Miller came back and stood quiet, patient; in a few minutes the man seemed to become aware of him.

"I forgot, Miller. You'll want to know," he said in a tone which went to show an old bond between the two. "You'll be sorry to hear, Miller," he said—and the dull eyes moved difficultly to the anxious ones,

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and his voice was uninflected—“you’ll be sorry to know that the coroner’s jury decided that Master Jack was a murderer.”

The word came more horribly because of an air of detachment from the man’s mind. It was like a soulless, evil mechanism, running unguided. Miller caught at a chair.

“I don’t believe it, sir,” he gasped. “No lawyer shall make me. I’ve known him since he was ten, Judge, and they’re mistaken. It’s not any mere lawyers can make me believe that awful thing, sir, of our Master Jack.” The servant was shaking from head to foot with intense rejection, and the man put up his hand as if to ward off his emotion.

“I wish I could agree with you,” he said quietly, and then added,

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“Thank you, Miller.” And the old butler, walking as if struck with a sickness, was gone.

The man sat on the edge of the divan staring out of the window, minute after minute; the November wind tossed the clean, black lines of the branches backward and forward against the copper sky, as if a giant hand moved a fan of sea-weed before a fire. The man sat still and stared. The sky dulled; the delicate, wild branches melted together; the diamond lines in the window blurred; yet, unmoved, unseeing, the eyes stared through them.

The burr of an electric bell sounded; some one came in at the front door and came to the door of the library, but the fixed figure did not stir. The newcomer stood silent a

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minute, two minutes; a young man in clerical dress, boyish, with gray, serious eyes. At length he spoke.

“May I come in? It’s Dick.”

The man’s head turned slowly and his look rested inquiringly on his nephew. It was a minute before he said, as if recognizing him, “Dick. Yes.” And set himself as before to the persistent gazing through the window.

“I lost you at the court-house,” the younger man said. “I didn’t mean to let you come home alone.”

“Thank you, Dick.” It seemed as if neither joy nor sorrow would find a way into the quiet voice again.

The wind roared; the boughs rustled against the glass; the fire, soberly settled to work, steamed and crackled; the clock ticked indifferently; there was no other sound in

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the room; the two men were silent, the one staring always before him, the other sitting with a hand on the older man's hand, waiting. Minutes they sat so, and the wintry sky outside darkened and lay sullenly in bands of gray and orange against the windows; the light of the logs was stronger than the daylight; it flickered carelessly across the ashiness of the emotionless face. The young man, watching the face, bent forward and gripped his other hand on the unresponsive one in his clasp.

“Uncle,” he asked, “will it make things worse if I talk to you?”

“No, Dick.”

Nothing made a difference, it seemed. Silence or words must simply fall without effect on the rock bottom of despair. The young man

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halted, as if dismayed, before this overpowering inertia of hopelessness; he drew a quick breath.

“A coroner’s jury isn’t infallible. I don’t believe it of Jack—a lot of people don’t believe it,” he said.

The older man looked at him heavily. “You’d say that. Jack’s friends will. I’ve been trained to weigh evidence—I must believe it.”

“Listen,” the young man urged. “Don’t shut down the gates like that. I’m not a lawyer, but I’ve been trained to think, too, and I believe you’re not thinking squarely. There’s other evidence that counts besides this. There’s Jack—his personality.”

“It has been taken into consideration.”

“It can’t be taken into considera-

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tion by strangers—it needs years of intimacy to weigh that evidence as I can weigh it—as you— You know best of all,” he cried out impulsively, “if you’ll let yourself know, how impossible it was. That Jack should have bought that pistol and taken it to Ben Armstrong’s rooms to kill him—it was impossible—impossible!” The clinched fist came down on the black broadcloth knee with the conviction of the man behind it. The words rushed like melted metal, hot, stinging, not to be stopped. The judge quivered as if they had stung through the callousness, touched a nerve. A faint color crawled to his cheeks; for the first time he spoke quickly, as if his thoughts connected with something more than gray matter.

“You talk about my not allowing

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myself to believe in Jack. You seem not to realize that such a belief would—might—stand between me and madness. I've been trying to adjust myself to a possible scheme of living—getting through the years till I go into nothingness. I can't. All I can grasp is the feeling that a man might have if dropped from a balloon and forced to stay gasping in the air, with no place in it, nothing to hold to, no breath to draw, no earth to rest on, no end to hope for. There is nothing beyond."

"Everything is beyond," the young man cried triumphantly. "'The end,' as you call it, is an end to hope for—it is the beginning. The beginning of more than you have ever had—with them, with the people you care about."

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The judge turned a ghastly look upon the impetuous, bright face. “If I believed that, I should be even now perfectly happy. I don’t see how you Christians can ever be sorry when your friends die—it’s childish; anybody ought to be able to wait a few years. But I don’t believe it,” he said heavily, and went on again as if an inertia of speech were carrying him as an inertia of silence had held him a few minutes before. “When my wife died a year ago it ended my personal life, but I could live Jack’s life. I was glad in the success and honor of it. Now the success—” he made a gesture. “And the honor—if I had that, only the honor of Jack’s life left, I think I could finish the years with dignity. I’ve not been a bad

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man—I've done my part and lived as seemed right. Before I'm old the joy is wiped out and long years left. Why? It's not reasonable—not logical. With one thing to hold to, with Jack's good name, I might live. How can I, now? What can I do? A life must have a *raison d'être*."

"Listen," the clergyman cried again. "You are not judging Jack as fairly as you would judge a common criminal. You know better than I how often juries make mistakes—why should you trust this jury to have made none?"

"I didn't trust the jury. I watched as I have never before known how to watch a case. I felt my mind more clear and alert than common."

"Alert!" he caught at the word. "But alert on the side of terror—

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abnormally clear to see what you dreaded. Because you are fair-minded, because it has been the habit of your life to correct at once any conscious prejudice in your judgment, you have swayed to the side of unfairness to yourself, to Jack. Uncle," he flashed out, "would it tear your soul to have me state the case as I see it? I might, you know—I might bring out something that would make it look different."

Almost a smile touched the gray lines of his face. "If you wish."

The young man drew himself into his chair and clasped his hands around his knee. "Here it is. Mr. Newbold, on the seventh floor of the Bruzon bachelor apartments, heard a shot at one in the morning, next

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his bedroom, in Ben Armstrong's room. He hurried into the public hall, saw the door wide open into Ben's apartment, went in and found Ben shot dead. Trying to use the telephone to call help, he found it was out of order. So he rushed again into the hall toward the elevator with the idea of getting Dr. Avery, who lived below on the second floor. The elevator door was open also, and a man's opera-hat lay near it on the floor; he saw, just in time, that the car was at the bottom of the shaft, almost stepping inside, in his excitement, before he noticed this. Then he ran down the stairs with Jack's hat in his hand, and got Dr. Avery, and they found Jack at the foot of the elevator shaft. It was known that Ben Armstrong and

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Jack had quarrelled the day before; it was known that Jack was quick-tempered; it is known that he bought that evening the pistol which was found on the floor by Ben, loaded, with one empty shell. That's the story."

The steady voice stopped a moment and the young man shivered slightly; his look was strained. Steadily he went on.

"That's the story. From that the coroner's jury have found that Jack killed Ben Armstrong—that he bought the pistol to kill him, and went to his rooms with that purpose; that in his haste to escape, he missed seeing that the elevator was down, as Mr. Newbold all but missed seeing it later, and jumped into the shaft and was killed instantly him-

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self. That's what the jury get from the facts, but it seems to me they're begging the question. There are a hundred hypotheses that would fit the case of Jack's innocence—why is it reasonable to settle on the one that means his guilt? This is my idea. Jack and Ben Armstrong had been friends since boyhood and Jack, quick-tempered as he was, was warm-hearted and loyal. It was like him to decide suddenly to go to Ben and make friends. He had been to a play in the evening which had more or less that *motif*; he was open to such influences. It was like the pair of them, after the reconciliation, to set to work looking at Jack's new toy, the pistol. It was a brand-new sort, and the two have been interested always in guns—I remember

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how I, as a youngster, was impressed when Ben and Jack bought their first shot-guns together. Jack had got the pistol at Mellingham's that evening, you know—he was likely to be keen about it still, and then—it went off. There are plenty of other cases where a man has shot his friend by accident—why shouldn't poor Jack be given the benefit of the doubt? The telephone wouldn't work; Jack rushed out with the same idea which struck Mr. Newbold later, of getting Dr. Avery—and fell down the shaft.

“For me there is no doubt. I never knew him to hold malice. He was violent sometimes, but that he could have gone about for hours with a pistol in his pocket and murder in his heart; that he could have

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planned Ben Armstrong's death and carried it out deliberately—it's a contradiction in terms. It's impossible, being Jack. You must know this—you know your son—you know human nature."

The rapid *résumé* was but an impassioned appeal. Its answer came after a minute; to the torrent of eager words, three words:

"Thank you, Dick."

The absolute lack of impression on the man's judgment was plain.

"Ah!" The clergyman sprang to his feet and stood, his eyes blazing, despairing, looking down at the bent, listless figure. How could he let a human being suffer as this one was suffering? Quickly his thoughts shifted their basis. He could not affect the mind of the lawyer; might

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he reach now, perhaps, the soul of the man? He knew the difficulty, for before this his belief had crossed swords with the agnosticism of his uncle, an agnosticism shared by his father, in which he had been trained, from which he had broken free only five years before. He had faced the batteries of the two older brains at that time, and come out with the brightness of his new-found faith untarnished, but without, he remembered, scratching the armor of their profound doubt in everything. One could see, looking at the slender black figure, at the visionary gaze of the gray wide eyes, at the shape of the face, broad-browed, ovalled, that this man's psychic make-up must lift him like wings into an atmosphere outside a material, out-

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side even an intellectual world. He could breathe freely only in a spiritual air, and things hard to believe to most human beings were, perhaps, his every-day thoughts. He caught a quick breath of excitement as it flashed to his brain that now, possibly, was coming the moment when he might justify his life, might help this man whom he loved, to peace. The breath he caught was a prayer; his strong, nervous fingers trembled. He spoke in a tone whose concentration lifted the eyes below him, that brooded, stared.

“I can’t bear it to stand by and see you go under, when there’s help close. You said that if you could believe that they were living, that you would have them again, you would be perfectly happy no matter

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how many years you must wait. They are living as sure as I am here, and as sure as Jack was here, and Jack's mother. They are living still. Perhaps they're close to you now. You've bound a bandage over your eyes, you've covered the vision of your spirit, so that you can't see; but that doesn't make nothingness of God's world. It's there—here—close, maybe. A more real world than this—this little thing.” With a boyish gesture he thrust behind him the universe. “What do we know about the earth, except effects upon our consciousness? It's all a matter of inference—you know that better than I. The thing we do know beyond doubt is that we are each of us a something that suffers and is happy. How is that something the

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same as the body—the body that gets old and dies—how can it be? You can't change thought into matter—not conceivably—everybody acknowledges that. Why should the thinking part die then, because the material part dies? When the organ is broken is the organist dead? The body is the hull, the covering, and when it has grown useless it will fall away and the live seed in it will stand free to sunlight and air—just at the beginning of life, as a plant is when it breaks through earth in the spring. It's the seed in the ground, and it's the flower in the sunlight, but it's the same thing—the same life—it is—it *is*.” The boy's intensity of conviction shot like a flame across the quiet room.

“It is the same thing with us too.

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The same spirit-substance underlies both worlds and there is no separation in space, only in view-point. Life goes on—it's just transfigured. It's as if a bandage should be lifted from our eyes and we should suddenly see things in whose presence we had been always."

The rushing, eager voice stopped. He bent and laid his hand on the older man's and stared at his face, half hidden now in the shadows of the lowering fire. There was no response. The heavy head did not lift and the attitude was unstirred, hopeless. As if struck by a blow he sprang erect and his fingers shut hard. He spoke as if to himself, brokenly.

"He does not believe—a single word—I say. I can't help him—I *can't* help him."

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Suddenly the clinched fists flung out as if of a power not their own, and his voice rang across the room.

“God!” The word shot from him as if a thunderbolt fell with it. “God! Lift the bandage!”

A log fell with a crash into the fire; great battling shadows blurred all the air; he was gone.

The man, startled, drew up his bent shoulders, and pushed back a lock of gray hair and stared about, shaking, bewildered. The ringing voice, the word that had flashed as if out of a larger atmosphere—the place was yet full of these, and the shock of it added a keenness to his misery. His figure swung sideways; he fell on the cushions of the sofa and his arms stretched across them, his gray head lying heedless; sobs

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that tore roots came painfully; it was the last depth. Out of it, without his volition, he spoke aloud.

“God, God, God!” his voice said, not prayerfully, but repeating the sound that had shocked his torture. The word wailed, mocked, reproached, defied—and yet it was a prayer. Out of a soul in mortal stress that word comes sometimes driven by a force of the spirit like the force of the lungs fighting for breath—and it is a prayer.

“God, God, God!” the broken voice repeated, and sobs cut the words. And again. Over and over, and again the sobbing broke it.

As suddenly as if a knife had stopped the life inside the body, all sound stopped. A movement shook the man as he lay face down, arms

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stretched. Then for a minute, two minutes, he was quiet, with a quiet that meant muscles stretched, nerves alert. Slowly, slowly the tightened muscles of the arms pushed the shoulders backward and upward; the head lifted; the face turned outward, and if an observer had been there he might have seen by the glow of the firelight that the features wet, distorted, wore, more than all at this moment, a look of amazement. Slowly, slowly, moving as if afraid to disturb something—a dream—a presence—the man sat erect as he had been sitting before, only that the rigidity was in some way gone. He sat alert, his eyes wide, filled with astonishment, gazing before him eagerly—a look different from the dull stare of an hour ago by the

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difference between hope and despair. His hands caught at the stuff of the divan on either side and clutched it.

All the time the look of his face changed; all the time, not at once, but by fast, startling degrees, the gray misery which had bound eyes and mouth and brow in iron dropped as if a cover were being torn off and a light set free. Amazement, doubting, incredulous came first, and with that eagerness, trembling and afraid. And then hope—and then the fear to hope. And hunger. He bent forward, his eyes peered into the quiet emptiness, his fingers gripped the cloth as if to anchor him to a wonder, to an unbelievable something; his body leaned—to something—and his face now was the

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face of a starved man, of a man dying from thirst, who sees food, water, salvation.

And his face changed; a quality incredible was coming into it—joy. He was transformed. Lines softened by magic; color came, and light in the eyes; the first unbelief, the amazement, shifted surely, swiftly, and in a flash the whole man shone, shook with rapture. He threw out before him his arms, reaching, clasping, and from his radiant look the arms might have held all happiness.

A minute he stayed so with his hands stretched out, with face glowing, then slowly, his eyes straining as if perhaps they followed a vision which faded from them—slowly his arms fell and the expectancy went from his look. Yet not the light,

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not the joy. His body quivered; his breath came unevenly, as of one just gone through a crisis; every sense seemed still alive to catch a faintest note of something exquisite which vanished; and with that the spell, rapidly as it had come, was gone. And the man sat there quiet, as he had sat an hour before, and the face which had been leaden was brilliant. He stirred and glanced about the room as if trying to adjust himself, and his eyes smiled as they rested on the familiar objects, as if for love of them, for pleasure in them. One might have said that this man had been given back at a blow youth and happiness. Movement seemed beyond him yet—he was yet dazed with the newness of a marvel—but he turned his head and

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saw the fire and at that put out his hand to it as if to a friend.

The electric bell burred softly again through the house, and the man heard it, and his eyes rested inquiringly on the door of the library. In a moment another man stood there, of his own age, iron-gray, strong-featured.

“Dick told me I might come,” he said. “Shall I trouble you? May I stay with you awhile?”

The judge put out his hand friendlily, a little vaguely, much as he had put it out to the fire. “Surely,” he said, and the newcomer was all at once aware of his look. He started.

“You’re not well,” he said. “You must take something—whiskey—Miller——”

The butler moved in the room

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making lights here and there, and he came quickly.

“No,” the judge said. “I don’t want anything—I don’t need anything. It’s not as you think. I’ll tell you about it.”

Miller was gone; Dick’s father waited, his gaze fixed on the judge’s face anxiously, and for moments no word was spoken. The judge gazed into the fire with the rapt, smiling look which had so startled his brother-in-law. At length:

“I don’t know how to tell you,” he said. “There seem no words. Something has happened, yet it’s difficult to explain.”

“Something happened?” the other repeated, bewildered but guarded. “I don’t understand. Has some one been here? Is it about—the trial?”

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“No.” A slight spasm twisted the smiling lines of the man’s mouth, but it was gone and the mouth smiled still.

A horror-struck expression gleamed for a second from the anxious eyes of the brother-in-law, but he controlled it quickly. He spoke gently. “Tell me about it—it will do you good to talk.”

The judge turned from the fire, and at sight of his flushed cheeks and lighted eyes the other shrank back, and the judge saw it. “You needn’t be alarmed,” he said quietly. “Nothing is wrong with me. But something has happened, as I told you, and everything—is changed.” His eyes lifted as he spoke and strayed about the room as if considering a change which had come also to the accustomed setting.

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A shock of pity flashed from the other, and was mastered at once. “Can you tell me what has happened?” he urged. The judge, his face bright with a brightness that was dreadful to the man who watched him, held his hand to the fire, turning it about as if enjoying the warmth. The other shivered. There was silence for a minute. The judge broke it, speaking thoughtfully:

“Suppose you had been born blind, Ned,” he began, “and no one had ever given you a hint of the sense of vision, and your imagination had never presented such a power to your mind. Can you suppose that?”

“I think so—yes,” the brother-in-law answered, with careful gentleness, watching always the illumined

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countenance. "Yes, I can suppose it."

"Then fancy if you will that all at once sight came, and the world flashed before you. Do you think you'd be able to describe such an experience?"

The voice was normal, reflective. Many a time the two had talked together of such things in this very room, and the naturalness of the scene, and of the judge's manner, made the brother-in-law for a second forget the tragedy in which they were living.

"Why, of course," he answered. "If one had never heard of such a power one's vocabulary wouldn't take in the words to describe it."

"Exactly," the judge agreed. "That's the point I'm making. Per-

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haps now I may tell you what it is that has happened. Or rather, I may make you understand how a definite and concrete event has come to pass, which I can't tell you."

Alarm suddenly expressed itself beyond control in the brother-in-law's face. "John, what do you mean? Do you see that you distress me? Can't you tell clearly if some one has been here—what it is, in plain English, that has happened?"

The judge turned his dreamy, bright look toward the frightened man. "I do see—I do see," he brought out affectionately. "I'll try to tell, as you say, in plain English. But it is like the case I put—it is a question of lack of vocabulary. A remarkable experience has occurred

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in this room within an hour. I can no more describe it than the man born blind could describe sight. I can only call it by one name, which may startle you. A revelation."

"A revelation!" the tone expressed incredulity, scarcely veiled scorn.

The judge's brilliant gaze rested undisturbed on the speaker. "I understand—none better. A day ago, two hours ago, I should have answered in that tone. We have been trained in the same school, and have thought alike. Dick was here a while ago and said things—you know what Dick would say. You know how you and I have been sorry for the lad—been indulgent to him—with his keen, broad mind and that inspired self-forgetfulness of his—

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how we've been sorry to have such qualities wasted on a parson, a religion machine. We've thought he'd come around in time, that he was too large a personality to be tied to a treadmill. We've thought that all along, haven't we? Well, Dick was here, and out of the hell where I was I thought that again. When he talked I thought in a way—for I couldn't think much—that after a consistent voyage of agnosticism, I wouldn't be whipped into snivelling belief at the end, by shipwreck. I would at least go down without surrendering. In a dim way I thought that. And all that I thought then, and have thought through my life, is nothing. Reasoning doesn't weigh against experience. Dick is right."

The other man sat before him,

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bent forward, his hands on his knees, listening, dazed. There was a quality in the speaker's tone which made it necessary to take his words seriously. Yet—the other sighed and relaxed a bit as he waited, watched. The calm voice went on.

"The largest event of my life has happened in the last hour, in this room. It was this way. When Dick went out I—went utterly to pieces. It was the farthest depth. Out of it I called on God, not knowing what I did. And he answered. That's what happened. As if—as if a bandage had been lifted from my eyes, I was—I was in the presence of things—indescribable. There was no change, only that where I was blind before I now saw. I don't mean vision. I haven't words to

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explain what I mean. But a world was about me as real as this; it had perhaps always been there; in that moment I was first aware of it. I knew, as if a door had been opened, what heaven means—a condition of being. And I knew another thing more personal—that, without question, it was right with those I thought I had lost and that the horror which seemed blackest I have no need to dread. I cannot say that I saw them or heard or touched them, but I was with them. I understand, but I can't make you understand. I told Dick an hour ago that if I could believe they were living, that I should ever have them again, I should be perfectly happy. That's true now. I believe it, and I am—perfectly happy."

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The listener groaned uncontrollably.

“I know your thought,” the judge answered the sound, and his eyes were like lamps as he turned them toward the man. “But you’re wrong—my mind is not unhinged. You’ll see. After what I’ve gone through, after facing eternity without hope, what are mere years? I can wait. I know. I am—perfectly happy.”

Then the man who listened rose from his chair and came and put a hand gently on the shoulder of the judge, looking down at him gravely. “I don’t understand you very well, John,” he said, “but I’m glad of anything—of anything”—his voice went suddenly. “Will you wait for me here a few minutes? I’m going

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home and I'll be back. I think I'll spend the night with you if you don't object."

"Object! Wait!" The judge looked up in surprise, and with that he smiled. "I see. Surely. I'd like to have you here. Yes, I'll certainly wait."

Outside in the hall one might have heard the brother-in-law say a low word or two to Miller as the man helped him on with his coat; then the front door shut softly, and he was gone, and the judge sat alone, his head thrown back against his chair, his face luminous.

The other man swung down the dark street, rushing, agitated. As he came to the corner an electric light shone full on him and a figure crossing down toward him halted.

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“Father! I was coming to find you. Something extraordinary has happened. I was coming to find you.”

“Yes, Dick.” The older man waited.

“I’ve just left Charley Owen at the house—you remember Charley Owen?”

“No.”

“Oh, yes, you do—he’s been here with—Jack. He was in Jack’s class in college—in Jack’s and Ben Armstrong’s. He used to go on shooting trips with them both—often.”

“I remember now.”

“Yes, I knew you would.” The young voice rushed on. “He has been away just now—down in Florida shooting—away from civilization. He got all his mail for a month in

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one lump—just now—two days ago. In it was a letter from Jack and Ben Armstrong, written that night, written together. Do you see what that means?"

"What!" The word was not a question, but an exclamation. "What—Dick!"

"Yes—yes. There were newspapers, too, which gave an account of the trial—the first he'd heard of it—he was away in the Everglades. He started instantly, and came on here when he had read the papers, and realized the bearing his letter would have on the trial. He has travelled day and night. He hoped to get here in time. Jack and Ben thought he was in New York. They wrote to ask him to go duck-shooting—with them. And, father—here's

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the most startling point of it all." As the man waited, watching his son's face, he groaned suddenly and made a gesture of despair.

"Don't, father—don't take it that way. It's good—it's glorious—it clears Jack. My uncle will be almost happy. But I wouldn't tell him at once—I'd be careful," he warned the other.

"What was it—the startling point you spoke of?"

"Oh—surely—this. The letter to Charley Owen spoke of Jack's new pistol—that pistol. Jack said they would have target-shooting with it in camp. They were all crack shots, you know. He said he had bought it that evening, and that Ben thought well of it. Ben signed the letter after Jack, and then added a postscript.

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It clears Jack—it clears him. Doesn't it, father? But I wouldn't tell my uncle just yet. He's not fit to take it in for a few hours—don't you think so?"

"No, I won't tell him—just yet."

The young man's wide glance concentrated with a flash on his father's face. "What is it? You speak queerly. You've just come from there. How is he—how is my uncle?"

There was a letter-box at the corner, a foot from the older man's shoulder. He put out his hand and held to the lid a moment before he answered. His voice was harsh.

"Your uncle is—perfectly happy," he said. "He's gone mad."





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